

Nearby Narratives Project

Part One: Informed Persuasion Audio Essay

Part Two: “Fund My Project” Advocacy Speech

Assignment Summary:

At the end of a semester of Rhetoric 1030 at the University of Iowa, students engage in a work of informed persuasion. Previously called “advocacy” projects, “informed persuasion” assignments ask students not to only analyze others’ arguments, but also craft persuasive arguments of their own, informed by careful research.

Since my Rhetoric course focuses on narrative and argumentation, I designed an “informed persuasion” assignment sequence that asks students to advocate for a story deserving wider recognition. In the first part of the project, students create a podcast (or “audio essay”) showcasing an under-recognized narrative. In the podcast, each student picks an interviewee and makes an argument concerning why the narrative he or she has uncovered is important and deserves wider acknowledgement. Students write (and record) narratives informed by an in-person or audio interview, as well as thorough research on a specific topic relevant to featured aspect of that person’s narrative.

After completing their podcasts, students prepare a “Fund My Project” speech. In this speech, students propose projects inspired by their Nearby Narratives to a group of “investors” (fellow classmates). This project could aim to simply publicize the interviewee’s story, raise funds for a related cause, or promote awareness for an issue the interviewee cares about. The speeches include an explanation of the project, a plan for its completion, and a compelling case for what it will accomplish and how it will be effective.

Skills Practiced and Developed in this Assignment

- Critically thinking and engaging with the people and narratives that surround us
 - Identifying and narrowing research topics that are the appropriate size for our goals
 - Finding and evaluating library resources that are useful and relevant for our projects
 - Citing sources appropriately and ethically through integrating quotations smoothly and paraphrasing where helpful
 - Organizing an essay using both narrative and research while sustaining an argument
 - Revising our writing so that it is well-crafted and persuasive.
 - Engaging with audio editing software to compose a meaningful and artistic multimedia narrative
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- Creating innovative and original ways to advocate for causes, stories or issues we care about
 - Researching and planning an event or project while considering timelines and budgets
 - Persuading an audience of the efficacy and importance of our ideas
 - Professionally and clearly presenting our proposals and plans

The following document includes:

Part One: Informed Persuasion Audio Essay

- Assignment Sheet
- Prewriting Activity

Part Two: “Fund My Project” Advocacy Speech

- Assignment Sheet
- Brainstorming Workshop Guide

Nearby Narratives Project

Part One: Informed Persuasion Audio Essay

Task:

Create an audio essay, also called a *podcast*, showcasing an under-recognized narrative. In the podcast, make an argument that the narrative you've uncovered is important and deserves wider acknowledgement. Your telling of this narrative will be informed by an in-person or audio interview, as well as thorough research on a specific topic relevant to that person's narrative.

Due Dates and Assignment Calendar

Proposal Assignment: Friday, October 16th at 6:30 pm to the ICON Dropbox

Interviews Completed: Monday, October 26th

Source Annotations: Thursday, October 29th

Storyboards: Monday, November 2nd

Script Draft Workshop: Thursday, November 5th

Podcast Workshop: Wednesday, November 11th

Final Script and Podcast Due: Friday, November 13th at 6:30 pm to the ICON Dropbox

Assignment Description

So far this semester, we have read or are beginning to read *The Complete Maus* and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, two books inspired by a common desire: to tell some else's story, a story that each author felt the world needed to hear. In your final two major assignments, you will have the opportunity to share and advocate for the importance another's story, a story you find worth telling.

In your previous speech and essay, you practiced **rhetorical analysis**, the skill of critically understanding the construction of an argument, and **describing multiple perspectives**, or mapping out perspectives on a single issue. This assignment asks you to engage in skills of **informed persuasion**. This assignment requires investigating, researching, and eventually advocating for a person who you believe to be under-recognized.

For this assignment, you will:

- a) Think of someone you know or know of whom you *think deserves more recognition*. Perhaps they stand for a cause you believe in, live their lives according to values that resonate with you, have gone through astonishing hardship, or completed a project you admire. Regardless, they should be someone you do not already know a lot about, so avoid relatives and best friends.
- b) Reflect on *why* you think this narrative deserves recognition. Let this narrow the focus of your audio essay to an *aspect* of this person's life story (think of this as a memoir, not a biography). Then, select an adequately specific and manageable research topic that will shed light on this aspect of your person's life. We will discuss research topic selection more thoroughly in class.
- c) With this person's permission, perform your own "investigative journalism" by conducting and recording an in-person or audio interview. We will discuss interview strategies and etiquette in class.
- d) Conduct research on your specified topic (see letter (b)). Find 3-4 sources (at least 2 will be academic, peer-reviewed sources) on the topic to integrate into your final audio essay. We will spend an entire week of class (October 26th-October 29th) learning about, practicing, and conducting academic research.

- e) With this research in hand, craft a 5-6 page essay advocating for the importance of this person's story, weaving together his/her story with your research. This essay will serve as a script for your 8-10 minute podcast, which will serve as the final product of this essay.

Technical Requirements

A successful audio essay will include:

- ✓ An 8-10 minute podcast based on a 5-6 page "script" that:
 - Tells a story by weaving together material from both an interview and 3-4 other sources (at least two will be academic, peer-reviewed sources) using MLA, APA, or CMS citation format.
 - Supports a thesis that makes an argument about why this narrative deserves wider recognition
 - Builds on participation in each of the "Process Steps" below and incorporates feedback from peers and instructor

Skills Practiced and Developed in this Assignment

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Process Steps

Proposal Assignment:

Compose a proposal that describes your narrative project. In about a page of typed text, describe:

1. The narrative you plan to feature
 - a. The person you think deserves recognition
 - b. Why you think that person deserves recognition
 - c. The aspect of their story that you will focus on
2. A thesis statement that succinctly (1-2 sentences) argues why this narrative deserves wider attention.
3. Your proposed research topic and questions that will guide your inquiry

On a separate page, include:

4. A list of interview questions that you will use in your in-person interview

Conduct and record interviews

The format and formality of your interviews will depend on your focus. An open conversation that sometimes touches upon your interview questions will allow your interviewee space to add their own perspectives. You must inform the people you interview about your project. Ask them to sign the interviewee release form. If they do not wish to sign the form, then don't include their voice in your podcast. Be sure to bring release forms with you when you conduct interviews

When recording interviews, make a few practice recordings to be sure that you know how to use your equipment as well as how to position the recording device in order to capture a strong recording of your interviewee. Remember that a noisy space is not a good space for recording interviews.

Record sounds that will help create the soundscape for your narrative. For instance, if your interviewee mentions a choir they enjoy, and if that statement is important in your podcast, try to get some recorded sound of the choir in a performance or practice. You will then be able to have choral singing in the background of your podcast.

Source Annotations:

For three sources, you will complete an “annotation” which, in short, is a summary of a source and an explanation of why and how it will be useful to you. Each annotation will be a hefty paragraph (7-8 sentences) that summarizes, assesses, and reflects on a source.

Annotations force us to read more carefully and ask us to read critically, instead of just collecting information. We will learn more about annotations and work on these together during our “research week.”

Storyboard

Instead of creating an outline, we will create storyboards that map out how we will structure the important parts of our narratives. These storyboards will help us consider where and how we want to integrate our research into our stories and how we can engage and sustain our audiences’ attention throughout the podcast.

Script Draft Workshop

Your “rough draft workshop” for this essay will be a workshop for the “script” of your podcast. You will bring in a complete hard copy of your draft, as well as questions and concerns to discuss with your peers.

Compose your podcast

Use the audio editing software of your choice (I recommend Audacity, which is free, open-source software available for Mac, Windows, and Linux. You can download it at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>). Import the audio files you want to work with. Make cuts and position your tracks in order to compose a smooth, 8-10 minute podcast narrative. There are many online tutorials (mostly video tutorials) that will help you use Audacity, Garage Band, or another application to edit your audio. Excellent tutorials are available through The University of Iowa’s subscription to Lynda. To access those tutorials, go to <http://lynda.uiowa.edu/> and sign in with your HawkID. We will practice using Audacity in class.

In a nutshell, composing with audio tracks is just like cutting, copying, and pasting in a Microsoft word document. You select and move around bits of audio you want to use, and you cut out any bits you don’t want to use. As a group, you will record narration to include in your podcast around the interviews and other sounds you collected while on location. Pay close attention to the organization of your project to ensure a cohesive and engaging podcast.

Podcast Workshop

Your “final draft” workshop will involve a workshop of your podcasts in process. Again, bring in questions and concerns to discuss with your instructor and peers.

Podcast Showcase

When the final projects are due, we will have a podcast showcase, during which you will have the opportunity to listen to others’ audio essays.

Nearby Narratives Project

Part One: Informed Persuasion Audio Essay Prewriting Activity

Think of someone you know or know of whom you *think deserves more recognition*. Perhaps they stand for a cause you believe in, live their lives according to values that resonate with you, have gone through astonishing hardship, or completed a project you admire. Regardless, they should be someone you do not already know a lot about, so avoid relatives and best friends.

Why do you think this person deserves more recognition? What is it about them or about their life that you find important and admirable?

How could you focus your telling of this person's narrative to one "aspect" of their life story, based on *why* you think this person deserves recognition (e.g., Henrietta Lacks's contribution to biomedical research, Vladek's experience in the concentration camps).

Research Topic Selection: What is a research topic that would shed light on this aspect of your potential interviewee's life. What would you want to know more about to be able to more fully tell this person's story? (e.g. Rebecca Skloot's research on cell biology, Art Spiegelman's research on the Holocaust).

Remember: Your final version of this essay will be only 5-7 pages! You can't talk about something as broad as the Holocaust, for example. How can you narrow your research topic so that it is specific and manageable for you?

Here are some examples from previous semesters:

Interviewee: Successful lawyer	Research topic: the Bar Exam
Interviewee: Cancer survivor	Research topic: Hodgkin's Lymphoma
Interviewee: Ukrainian immigrant	Research topic: Immigration from the Ukraine to the US
Interviewee: British woman who Volunteered in WWII	Research topic: Women's roles in WWII

You may find that you want to change your research topic after conducting your interview. That is fine! For now, though, think of a possible topic so that you have a research plan. Part of the research process is adjusting your research topics and questions as you gain more information.

Research Questions: It often helps the research process to rephrase your "topic" into a series of research "questions" that can help guide what you're looking to find. What exactly do you want to know about your research topic. Brainstorm several questions about your topic to guide your inquiry.

Nearby Narratives Project

Part Two: “Fund My Project”: Advocacy Speech

Task: In your second essay/podcast, you argued for the importance of someone’s story. This speech is an opportunity to propose a project inspired by this person’s story and/or an issue or topic related to it. You will not actually *complete* this project (though you can, if you want). Your speech will function as a platform to propose your project and convince your potential investors (your classmates) to fund the project.

I hesitate to give too strict of requirements for this speech because I want you to be able to be creative about this project. However, in order to give you some direction, here are some ideas of potential projects you could propose.

- A comic book (think *Maus I*)
- A 5-K Race
- A viral internet phenomenon (think the “Ice Bucket Challenge”)
- An art gallery
- A video game

Let your brain go crazy here. As this speech gets closer, you will have an opportunity to run ideas past me, but feel free to email me with ideas if you want to get the go ahead more quickly.

During your speech, you will:

- ✓ Convince the audience of the importance of your “nearby narrative”
- ✓ Propose your idea for publicizing/recognizing this story
- ✓ Explain what your project will accomplish and why you think it will be effective
- ✓ Provide a “sample” of something you would design, create, or make for your project (i.e.: comic book page, 5-K race T-shirt design, 2-minute promotional video, etc. NOTE: This will look different for every individual, depending on the proposed project. When you decide on your project idea, we will discuss the kind of “sample” you should provide)
- ✓ Layout your “plan” for achieving this project (timeline, goals, etc.): Consider:
 - The steps you would need to take to execute the project
 - Who you would need to contact
 - What resources you would need and how you would go about obtaining them
 - What logistical problems might arise and how you would address them
- ✓ Explain the amount of funding you request based on the resources you will need to complete this project. This will require some research: how much does it cost to film a documentary, on average? Will your project make any money? If so, what will you do with that money?

Assignment Timeline:

Thursday, November 19th: Brainstorming Workshop (Worksheet Due)

Wednesday, December 2nd: Rough Draft of Speech #2 Due (Rehearsals)

Speeches will take place on Monday, December 7th -Thursday, December 11th

